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Using Pinterest in the Management Classroom

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Using Pinterest in the Management Classroom

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Abstract

This paper discusses the potential value of using the social bookmarking site Pinterest in management courses. The general features and uses of Pinterest are described as well as how they can be applied in the management classroom. Pinterest offers a medium to facilitate student discovery and sharing of class relevant visual content. I discuss the use of Pinterest in my own training methods class with a class Pinterest board acting as a place for students to share class-relevant links to videos and online content based on assigned topics. I discuss other potential applications in management classes. I also discuss the logistics of implementation of a class Pinterest board and potential challenges of use.

Keywords

Pinterest, social media, video clips, training, movies, social bookmarking site

Pinterest Description

Pinterest (<https://www.pinterest.com/>) is a social bookmarking website and cell phone application that allows users to organize visual bookmarks and content links, called “pins.” Items that can be pinned include videos, diagrams, infographics, and web links. Users can scroll through cascades of images they themselves have pinned or that are on other boards that interest them. Pinterest offers users a good means to share and organize visual content, which can benefit instructors that have assignments where students interact with or create such content.

The pins on Pinterest are online material or user-created content. The pins a user adds are put onto user-controlled and user-created boards that represent organizing schemes such as “technology,” “travel,” and “food,” with users able to add descriptions for each pin. Each pin is represented by an image. Pinterest boards are evocative of physical pin boards. Pinterest describes itself as a place where users discover and save creative content to access later.

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Users can also interact with each other. A user can follow other users or follow particular boards that are of interest and be informed when content is added. Users can send direct messages to others on the site. A user can also allow other users to post on boards that user has created. The board creator can invite any follower of a particular board to become a board collaborator and gain the ability to add content to that board. In such cases the boards can then be collaborative in nature, with multiple users contributing to the board and its content, which is how I applied the site within my own classroom.

Pinterest is one of the most used social media sites on the Internet, with a recent Pew Research Center study finding that 28% of U.S. adults online use the site (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015). It has recently been announced that Pinterest has passed 100 million active users (Isaac, 2015).

Use in the Classroom

Pinterest has been used in the general college classroom in other disciplines. Pinterest has had applications such as art students sharing their own pictures created or examples of art styles, the sharing of inspirational quote related to class topics, and as a medium to facilitate peer critique in the classroom (Marino, 2012). To date, however, discussions of applications of Pinterest to the management classroom are lacking.

The features of Pinterest can facilitate learning and interaction in the management classroom. Pinterest can be used as a way for students to share videos and pictures relevant to class-related content as part of assignments. Video clips in the classroom have been recognized as beneficial to students helping understanding, interest, and engagement with class concepts and material (Billsbury, 2013; Champoux, 2001; Fee & Budde-Sung, 2014). While these clips can be very helpful on their own, Tyler, Anderson, and Tyler (2009) argue video clips can be even more effective when students are not just passive viewers of instructor-chosen clips but in fact the students pick their own clips to illustrate class-related concepts. They see this as having a significant impact on creating an active learning environment for students where students are not just observers but involved in the search for and evaluation of relevant material.

Pinterest can facilitate the process by which students find and share with fellow students video clips and visual content. I use Pinterest in my Training Methods course classroom, a course focused on teaching students how to develop and run organizational training programs. The course is a “hybrid” course with the course meeting once a week for an hour and 15 minutes and then the second half of the week having an online component. Assignments that use Pinterest make up a significant part of that online part. My experiential exercise examples draw on this class use of Pinterest, with Figure 1 showing what the actual board looks like.

Within my Training Methods classroom Pinterest is used to facilitate student discovery and sharing of relevant video clip content in the vein of Tyler et al. (2009), as well as to find and share relevant other content such as websites and blog entries. Students find relevant content for a week online, usually through YouTube, post it on

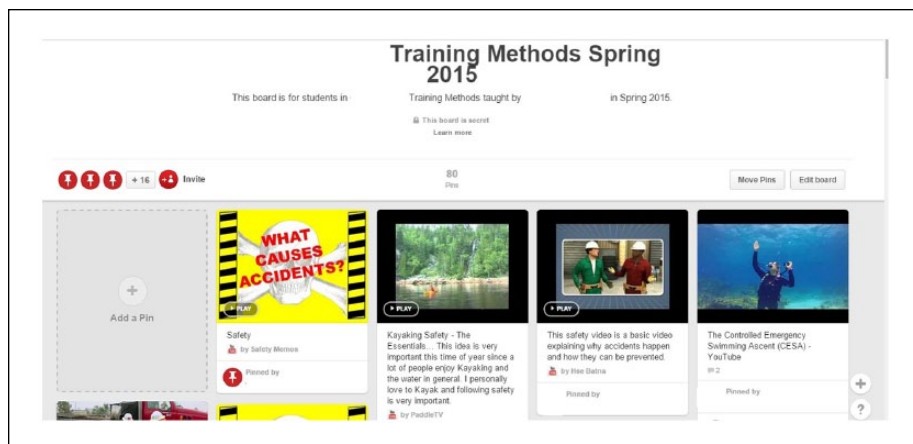


Figure 1. Example Pinterest board.

the class Pinterest board with a short description of what it is about and why it is relevant, and then go to the class's Blackboard website to analyze the content in a more detailed and thorough way within that more private class environment. Each assignment also requires a student to interact with another student's content, usually viewing the material and commenting or elaborating on it through the content on Blackboard. Five example assignments are in the online supplementary materials (available online at <http://mtr.sagepub.com/supplemental>), but I will also discuss an example assignment below.

For one Pinterest assignment students are asked to find an example video of a worker behaving in a way the organization would definitely not encourage or approve of, something that represents a performance gap between actual performance and expected performance. This assignment fits with the Training Methods textbook of Blanchard and Thacker's (2012) discussion of triggering events where a worker's actual performance is different from expected performance, which can lead to an organization realizing they have a need to fix a problem and determine if training is the right means to do so. I ask students to find an example video of something that could illustrate this performance gap that acts as a triggering event. They post the video example they find onto the course Pinterest board with a two-sentence description of what is wrong with the behavior seen in the video and why the organization might see it as a performance gap that must be corrected.

I leave what kind of video to be found up to the students as long as it fits the criteria of a negative behavior that could be seen as a performance gap. Within my class this led to a great variety of videos shared, some from TV show such as *Seinfeld*, real workplace clips such as a UPS driver running after his truck rolling down a hill, to sports such as a quarterback allowing interceptions. This discovery process allows students to find a clip that is meaningful and interesting to them that fits the needs of the assignment.

The next part of the assignment involves the student going to the course Blackboard website and making a message board post about the clip. I ask the student to describe why what was shown in the video might be seen as a performance gap. I then ask the student to describe how a needs analysis could help figure out why the negative behavior is happening.

Students are then asked to go to the class Pinterest board and watch at least one other student's posted video and read that other student's Blackboard post of the clip. Once they have done that they need to make a comment adding to the Blackboard post by describing one more area of needs analysis that could be helpful in the given situation, as well as one more unique reason why the undesirable behavior might be happening. So in these assignments students are both finding their own content and responding to the content found and created by other students.

For my class set-up, I try to use the strength of Pinterest as a visual medium for sharing material while pairing it with a learning management software like Blackboard and its message boards for more in-depth analysis of the material. Depending on the class and purpose, Pinterest could be paired with other social media or have relevant assignments wholly done through Pinterest. Students could also create their own pieces of content and upload them to a class Pinterest board. So, for example, students could each create a video on motivation and upload it to a class Pinterest board for other students to engage with. Students could also create their own boards to share content in a portfolio like context, with the instructor and other students visiting such boards for evaluation or analysis. Students could share other students' content on his or her own board, and Pinterest has functionality by which users can "like" content on the site. A student could pin or "like" content they find on Pinterest and describe why they think that content is relevant or useful. Pinterest content could also be elaborated on over time in more depth, for instance, one week finding a piece of content, the next week evaluating one's own or another student's content, and then in a future week having the student create their own related content and posting it to Pinterest. Pinterest has a number of useful tools, and instructional goals can guide which features are used.

Constructive Analysis and Comparison

While Pinterest can offer a good visual medium for student discovery and sharing of content, and research has shown promise in using social media in the classroom (Gerrard, 2012; Krom, 2012), there are certainly potential challenges and drawbacks to use. One potential challenge can be instructor knowledge of the site. For an instructor to use Pinterest successfully in the classroom he or she must first become familiar with the site and its features. The Pinterest YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZWInp-fw21fKVXLIRKfA>) offers a number of videos explaining Pinterest and how to do basic functions. Instructors thinking of using Pinterest for a class should spend some time getting familiar with the site first.

Instructor knowledge of the site is crucial, as some students in the class will have no previous experience with the site and may need instructor help when beginning use

of the site. This can be a challenge, as students will vary in their familiarity with the site. For my class I made sure to introduce Pinterest and how it works early in the semester. The first assignment through Pinterest is also a couple weeks into the semester so people have time to sign up for Pinterest accounts and start to get comfortable with using it. Some of my students felt uncomfortable with Pinterest when starting but they became comfortable as they did the assignments over time. Instructors might consider giving early assignments focused on getting users practice with the features that will be used later in the semester.

Instructors will need to set up the actual shared class board on Pinterest as well. If the instructor has an existing account, he or she can add a board for the course there. Instructors might also consider setting up a user account for the particular class and have a board or a series of boards on that account for the class. For students to participate in a board and post on it they need to first follow the board and then have you as the board owner add them as a collaborator. Important to note here is that boards can be open where anyone online can see the content or can be set to "secret," where users have to be invited to see the board at all, as well as to post on it. Depending on the type and sensitivity of content being shared (and potentially university policies) secret boards may be preferred. Instructors may also engage students directly in discussion of whether they would prefer the board to be public or secret.

Instructors might consider using other social media sites in addition to, or as an alternative to, Pinterest. Twitter allows the sharing of text, links, and pictures that could be used in a similar way. Instagram allows users to post images or videos. The right social media site to use might depend on your student population and what pedagogical need is being served by the site.

While there are challenges to using Pinterest in the classroom, it has the potential to help student engagement by being a medium for students taking an active role in discovering and sharing content (Tyler et al., 2009). My students generally were supportive of Pinterest and felt it was a beneficial class element. Successful implement has many potential advantages.

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